4: Villa Rojas E-4, 5 (1938-1944) 1969
NV9 Tzeltal NV9

787 776 been taken away by the local authorities and sent to the Indians' Affairs Office in San Cristobal.

Life Cycle

842 183 *Pregnancy and Childbirth*

843 [833] The strongest desire of every Tzeltal couple is to create a numerous family, preferably boys. The relationship between sexual intercourse and pregnancy is well understood among the Indians. They know that pregnancy lasts nine months and they keep a good count of it. On the other hand, there are ideas about the possibility of the woman being influenced by old men or "the owners of the nagual," who can interrupt pregnancy and change the fetus from one woman to another. This is why a woman who thinks she is pregnant for three or four months suddenly realizes that she carries nothing any more, while another one, maybe her neighbor, finds herself in advanced pregnancy, giving birth a few months later. It is to be stressed, however, that these changes can take place only among married women.

843 789

844 [81] In conservative villages (Tenejapa, Oxchuc, Cancuc) there is no professional midwife. Children are delivered by the oldest women in the neighborhood.

[757] [237] When labor begins, the first thing is to give the mother a beverage made of powdered opossum tail dissolved in boiling water. It is very common for Indians to have a dry tail hanging next the fireplace. The woman kneels at labor, facing the midwife. The husband's belt or the woman's rebozo is tied very tightly around the upper part of the abdomen to prevent the child from "going up again." The mother can also help herself by seizing a rope tied to the roof, or taking firm hold of any post of the house. The umbilical cord is chopped with a machete or cut with scissors, supported on an ear of corn. This ear is afterwards used as seed and is considered very fertile.

[241] [824]

[757] When labor has finished, the mother is given another hot beverage of pepper,

[P 223-B]

7: Nash E-5 (1957-1967) 1970 NV9 Tzeltal NV9
Amatenango del Valle

844 house, and the men usually leave the scene. Women are ashamed of their husbands seeing the afterbirth because they joke about it with other men. [522] (I do not know what the joking is about—possibly it is related to the fre- • [833] quency of sexual intercourse during pregnancy, since the placenta is believed to be increased by male sperm.)

There is no ceremony attending childbirth. Although some women are assisted by one female relative, most call in a midwife, who is referred to as "grandmother of the child" and who comes when the birth pangs [159] begin. There is only one recognized midwife in Tzo'ontahal; she is the sister of one of the practicing curers and a niece of one of the former leading curers of Alannantik. She has patients on both sides of the dual division. On rare occasions, caused by witchcraft the Indians believe, a woman [845] fails to give birth after two or three days of labor, and then a curer is [756] called in.

The child is delivered with the mother kneeling on the floor. The midwife cuts the umbilical cord with a knife, and the child's navel is tied with a cord. The child is wrapped in cloths which have been smoked over incense, and then a woman's sash is wrapped around him from shoulders to feet, firmly binding the arms and legs so that they cannot move. It is felt that if this is not done, the child will snatch at everything and eventually 846 become a thief. The body remains bound in this way for fifteen days. The umbilical cord and placenta are buried in the houseyard. Some say that a boy's umbilical cord may be tied in a tree "so that when the child grows, he can climb trees and cut fruit." The mother is given a drink of coffee, and the midwife binds her stomach with a band. Three days later the woman enters the sweatbath to cleanse herself. The midwife goes in with her and rubs her with branches of orange leaves and massages her stomach. If the child is born away from his own house, he is brought to it with great care so that his soul will not be dislodged from his body. The midwife makes a pad with branches of bushes growing near the springs, and the father sprays the child's body with springwater from his mouth.

[153] In the first "twenty days or one month" of life, the child's contacts with the world are limited to the immediate family in order to guard against soul-loss and illness from "hot" glances of outsiders. When anyone not of the household approaches the house in which there is a newborn child, he